

## **Transcription: Vernon Scofield**

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*Today is Thursday, April 14, 2011. My name is James Crabtree and today I'll be interviewing Mr. Scofield. This interview is being conducted at his home in Austin, Texas, and it's in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me today. It's an honor for me and for this whole program.*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, it's a pleasure to have you.

*Yes sir. I guess the first question I always like to ask is tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the military.*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, my grandfather was a doctor. He came from Kentucky to Hillsboro, Texas, in 1860. And after a couple of years, he married a niece of Sam Houston. And they had eight children. My father was the youngest. The oldest one they named Houston. Houston Scofield graduated from A&M in 1888. The rest of the family, other children, grew up, got married, and moved away and one thing you know it. By the time his father and mother died, my father was the only one left at home. And he inherited the farm north of Hillsboro, Texas. And he went in the Shorthorn cattle business and we showed cattle pretty much all the fairs from Tennessee and Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, all like that. And so, I went to A&M and studied animal husbandry.

*Because you grew up around that as a child? You knew farming and ranching, that sort of thing.*

**Vernon Scofield:** And of course, it was all male compulsory military in those days. So I studied animal husbandry but I had to take military, be in the military.

*So you were in the Corps of Cadets?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Corps of Cadets. When I graduated, they sent me to, because they had changed the schedule to where they didn't have any summer vacation. In other words, I went to school the 12 months. And so, we hadn't had an equivalent to an OCS class period, and I had to go to OCS in Virginia.

*Now you were enrolled as a student at A&M when the war started, is that right?*

**Vernon Scofield:** That's right. From '40 to '43.

*Do you remember where you were on Pearl Harbor Day? Do you remember how you learned about Pearl Harbor being bombed?*

**Vernon Scofield:** No. I hate to tell you this but I'll be 89 years old in July and I'm a hundred percent totally disabled, out of the military. And I tell people when I meet 'em, I said, "If I see you tomorrow, I won't remember your name." Because I can't even remember the names of my own grandchildren.

*So far you've remembered a lot, though, in this interview, just telling me about where you're from and that sort of thing.*

**Vernon Scofield:** So when I graduated from A&M, they had me report to active duty at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio. Well, my oldest brother was in the FBI but he happened to be home on vacation and my father had moved to Austin in 1934. And we were here. And I said, "I'm going to get me a little weekend pass, so get me a date." And when I got up here, I said, "Did you get me a date?" He said, "Sure." I said, "Who'd you get me a date with?" And he said, "Audrey Lee Kirkpatrick." I said, "That little ol' girl?" She was younger, the age of my younger sister. I hadn't seen her in 15 years and I thought. But we hit it off tremendous and we decided we'd get married the next time I could get leave to come out to Texas.

*Wow, that was pretty quick.*

**Vernon Scofield:** And so I went to Virginia.

*Went through Officer Candidate School.*

**Vernon Scofield:** And came back. And I said, "Next time I get some leave, I want to go to Texas because we'd planned to get married." He said, "You're not going to get any leave. You are a lieutenant." So we talked on the phone back and forth. And finally her mother, her sister, and her future brother-in-law drove from Texas to Virginia and we got married in the post chapel in 1943. And my wife is still living.

*That's great. That's a great story, sir.*

**Vernon Scofield:** It's kind of a miracle that I tell people what a wonderful relationship it's been and how long it's been.

*And how long have you been married now?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Since 1943.

*That's a blessing. Yes sir. And it all is because your brother set you up on basically a blind date.*

**Vernon Scofield:** A blind date, ha, ha.

*Now how did he come to pick her. Did he ever say?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, there was two or three girls who had jobs in Austin, that lived in the same house. He had a date with one of the other girls and they suggested this was the youngest one who was just visiting.

*Do you remember 1934, what did you do for a date in Austin in 1934?*

**Vernon Scofield:** 1943.

*Sorry. You moved here, your father moved here in '43.*

**Vernon Scofield:** My father was appointed Collector of Internal Revenue for the south half of Texas in 1934.

*Yes sir. So what did you do for dates then in 1943 in Austin?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, I graduated from college in '34 and we got married so I didn't do anything for any dates 'cause I went overseas and I went to North Africa, Italy, France, Germany. I made every country, visited every country in World War II.

*Were you and your wife able to write to each other while you were in the war?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yeah.

*How long would it take usually to get a letter? Would it take months or weeks?*

**Vernon Scofield:** It takes a couple of weeks, maybe something like that.

*Tell us a little bit about your service as a lieutenant in World War II? What were your thoughts?*

**Vernon Scofield:** I'm sorry to say that my memory is practically non-existent.

*Well, I disagree. You told me a lot so far.*

**Vernon Scofield:** I came by boat over to the Atlantic coast in Africa. And then, went all the way across North Africa to the big city that's on the other side of North Africa. Then they shipped me to Italy and I was assigned to some outfit and I served about halfway up to Rome. And they formed Seventh Army, which did not previously exist, and General Patch was the commander. And I was transferred from this company that I was assigned to, to the headquarters, Seventh Army. And we went back to Naples and took a landing ship infantry and went from the south end of Italy all the way up to the Riviera and landed there the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 1944. And I landed at H+4, and when I got my orders, boy, I said, "Gee, how lucky could I get?" I got a four-hour break, you know, from the first guys are H, plus H four is four hours later before I had to land. But they didn't tell me they were going to park that ship I was on right next to a battleship that four hours waiting. And it went boom, boom, boom. I started going deaf that day. And then, when I landed, I was assigned as a lieutenant to a company and it did just two things. We hauled gasoline and C-rations from the Riviera to the front. And we went all the way across France and most of the way across Germany. We kinda curved down towards Austria. When the war ended, I was 20 miles short of the Austrian border.

*Your specialty then was supply or transportation?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Right. And when I came back home, the clerk that was a lady at Fort Sam Houston, says, "Sir, what would like for me to do? Put you in the National Guard or the Reserve?" And I said, "Ma'am, if you'll excuse the language, I don't wanna be put in the damn thing." Well, she discharged me from the Army. I left San Antonio and came to Austin. She took her papers into her boss. Her boss says, "You can't do this." She says, "What do you mean?" She says, "Don't you know there's a regulation that you can't discharge an officer unless he resigns his commission?" So they canceled my discharge and put me in the Reserve. Two months later, I got a letter from the Reserve. They wanted to know why I wasn't doing anything. Well, I threw a fit. I ran around in circles. I called everybody a bad name, you know. And I had a friend who commanded a Quartermaster Battalion at Camp Mabry. And his battalion executive officer job was vacant. I had known him for many years. He said, "We'll be glad to have you. Come on out there." So I went out there and two years later, he left and I took command of that battalion, which was part of the 49<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. And I commanded it for something like 10 years.

*That's a long time. That was all in the Reserves?*

**Vernon Scofield:** In the National Guard. In 1960, we were mobilized. Well, they sent us to Louisiana. The Korean War was going on. I mean, the other one, south. But we stayed about a year and a half and they sent us back home. So, I just lacked a little bit to qualify for retirement at age 60 so I stayed in the National Guard. And it got mobilized again. I threw up my hands. I said, "If you can't whip 'em, join 'em." And I was appointed the United States Property and Fiscal Officer for the south half of Texas.

*That's quite a position.*

**Vernon Scofield:** It was only for a full colonel. I'd already made full colonel. Couldn't be transferred, could not be relieved except for calls, and you could stay until age 60. And I did all those things. Thirteen years.

*That's great. How did you get the appointment? Did it come through a member of congress or how did that happen?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, the previous USP and FO and his wife were our good friends and he recommended me. Well, Dolph Briscoe had been elected governor. And I went down, he and I had known each other for a number of years, and I went down to see Dolph. I told him, I said, "I never ever volunteered for any service up until now. The time factor is such that I want to stay if it's okay." He said, "Why Vernon, you know you can stay." Well, the adjutant general recommended, the assistant adjutant general, he was a Mexican boy, Bill Flores, recommended him to replace my predecessor. And then I'd served that period of time, to replace me. Well, I went to, that was the political traffic pattern. From the adjutant general to the governor to the Secretary of Army. So I stayed there 13 years.

*Because Dolph Briscoe was governor at that time?*

**Vernon Scofield:** I went to see him like the day after he took his oath of office.

*So you were in that position for 13 years?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yeah.

*That's great.*

**Vernon Scofield:** The 10 years that I commanded the Quartermaster Battalion, I lived at home on Scofield Ranch, which was north of Austin. From Parmer Lane to Howard Lane.

*That was your family's land?*

**Vernon Scofield:** And I managed that because being in the National Guard, that wasn't a full-time job, see? So I managed that and I bought an adjacent piece of land, everything that became available. So that when I got appointed this United States Property and Fiscal Officer, then it was a full-time job. My oldest brother was a lawyer. He took over and started selling off the property. By that time, we owned a thousand acres between Parmer Lane and Howard Lane, all of which is now in the city limits, and is all full developed.

*That's right. What's that feel like, to know that that was land that you used to farm and ranch and now there's thousands of people living on it? Does that strike you as strange?*

**Vernon Scofield:** It doesn't strike me as being anything particular because I've seen other cities grow and spread. I think when we came to Austin in 1934, it wasn't but 54,000 people. Something like that.

*When you came to Austin, did you live kind of where downtown is now?*

**Vernon Scofield:** When we came to Austin, we lived at 1002 West Avenue.

*West Avenue, yes sir.*

**Vernon Scofield:** And he, my father's office, was on Sixth and Colorado, but he built a new federal building up on 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

*And that's still there.*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yeah. And he supervised the construction of that new building and they moved up there.

*Were in high school or elementary school when you came to Austin in '34?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Elementary.

*Did you go to Austin High?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yes, I went to Austin High.

*And later went to Austin High?*

**Vernon Scofield:** I was not in elementary. I was in junior high. I had to go all the way across town to that. And then went to high school.

**Mrs. Scofield:** Was that the only junior high, Allen Junior High, at that time? Was that the only junior high in Austin?

**Vernon Scofield:** No, there was two.

*Two, yeah. But there's only one high school, is that right?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Right.

*You lived pretty close to that high school, right?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yeah, I just lived a block away.

*That's pretty nice.*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yeah, very convenient. It was at 12<sup>th</sup> and West Avenue, Rio Grande, and I was living at 1002 West Avenue.

*And now it's a community college. It's Austin Community College campus.*

**Vernon Scofield:** I don't know.

*I know it's still there. Ma'am, he was telling me about how you all met, and how it was a blind date you were set up on which I thought was a great story.*

**Mrs. Scofield:** Of course, we grew up together. I'm from Hillsboro also, and his younger sister and I were the same age. But, of course, there was three years difference in, and you didn't pay much attention to your younger sister's friends. But, we've known each other basically all of our lives.

*He was saying that you and your mom and future brother-in-law drove all the way to Virginia to get married.*

**Mrs. Scofield:** His mother and sister and my sister and mother and brother-in-law.

**Vernon Scofield:** Future brother-in-law.

**Mrs. Scofield:** Yeah, future, they weren't married at that time which was quite a feat because his father had a great big Buick automobile, and we could all get in it. And, of course, gasoline was rationed, and we got enough gasoline coupons from the families, both families had agricultural interests, and we had coupons for tractor gas and all kinds of gasoline coupons.

*Made it work.*

**Vernon Scofield:** I wouldn't say that. That probably was illegal.

*Well, I'm sure enough time has passed that they won't get you for it now. That is something. He was saying that you all were able to write to each other somewhat when he was in Europe and Africa, writing letters.*

**Mrs. Scofield:** Oh yes. It all, of course, went through the channels of the military but, yes, we were able to keep in touch.

*How long would it take for a letter, that he wrote you a letter, for you to get it? A couple months or . . . ?*

**Mrs. Scofield:** No, no. I don't think it took that long. I would say not to exceed a month. And then, of course, what did they call the little . . . ?

*Victory Mail? Where they'd shrink it down?*

**Mrs. Scofield:** Uh-huh, and that speeded things up. Yeah, he wrote along all the way.

*And did you know basically where he was in general during that time?*

**Mrs. Scofield:** Not really.

*He couldn't tell you.*

**Mrs. Scofield:** Because he couldn't reveal some of the times.

*Sir, can you tell me a little bit about what it was like coming home from the war? Do you remember that, sir? Can you tell me any of your thoughts, your memories about coming back home from World War II, what that was like, getting back home and seeing your wife again and being back in Texas?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, I don't, of course, it was a most pleasant relationship and friendship, and I think how long we've been married now, we must've gotten along pretty good.

*Sure. And how many children did you have?*

**Mrs. Scofield:** We had two.

**Vernon Scofield:** We had a boy and a girl.

*You've been in Austin all these years I guess.*

**Mrs. Scofield:** All of our married life, yes, except for the time that he was called back to active duty. We did go over to Fort Polk in Louisiana, and stayed there for that year that they were there because, of course, they were due to be shipped to Germany. This was during the Berlin crisis, but didn't have to go so we came back home after that year of active duty.

**Vernon Scofield:** Did you look at the inside?

*Yes sir. I'm looking now at a sheet of all your record assignments. That's a pretty long sheet of all the different places you went, 49<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, and boy, that is a lot of dates on here, 1943, '44, and '45, Quartermaster Service Company, and Quartermaster Battalion. Of all the years you were in the service, what were some of your favorite, what was something I guess you enjoyed the most? Is there something that stood out? Was it leading troops or was it your . . . ?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Oh, I can't say that. I went to A&M and studied military so it didn't particularly bother me. But it wasn't anything enjoyable.

*Really? Yeah. But you made a long career out of it nonetheless.*

**Vernon Scofield:** The reason why I made a long career out of it was they canceled my discharge at the end of World War II, and I went into the National Guard. Well, I was managing the ranch and I could attend the weekend drill at the National Guard so it was no problem. And then the association and friendships, and one thing that left up that I was appointed, which I told you a moment ago, United States Property and Fiscal Officer.

**Mrs. Scofield:** That put him back on active duty but we were still at home.

*Sure, yeah, that's great.*

**Vernon Scofield:** That was probably the second or third most important military assignment in the State of Texas.

*Absolutely. And was that located at Camp Mabry?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yeah it was. And I built the building. We were in Building 1, had offices, and I built the building that's over back, the back of Camp Mabry.

*I know exactly where that is. Yes sir. I used to belong to the Marine Reserve unit there at Camp Mabry so I know where that building is. It's still the Property and Fiscal Office, right?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yes, right.

*Tell us, sir, for people listening that aren't really familiar with that office, maybe explain just in general what that office does.*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, you understand from the language, United States Property and Fiscal Officer. Well, that means that all of the property that came from the federal government to the National Guard, I had to account for, and periodically inspect. And all the money that was paid to members of the National Guard in Texas, federal money, came, I had to anticipate.

*I'm sure it's a big deal, obviously, taking care of that much property, and then you're talking about troops' pay, that's certainly a priority.*

**Vernon Scofield:** Yeah, it's a big . . . I had 143 civilian employees.

*And were they pretty much all there at Mabry?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Oh yeah, they were all in that building.

*All in that building, yes sir. And I imagine a lot of accountants and auditors . . .*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, I say in that building, right next to that was a big warehouse. There's about 40 people in the warehouse.

*Would your office mail out the checks when the troops got paid?*

**Vernon Scofield:** No. We required, we had an inspection and we inspected the records of every unit in the state twice a year.

*Mainly I guess to make sure there wasn't any fraud and that sort of thing going on?*

**Vernon Scofield:** It was properly accounted for.

*Sure, that's great. And you were in that position for 13 years then?*

**Vernon Scofield:** And that was about four times longer than anybody had ever served in it since the law was passed in 1920.

**Mrs. Scofield:** It was compulsory retirement at age 60.

**Vernon Scofield:** Yeah, compulsory retirement at age 60.

*But you were able to serve beyond age 60 or you had to retire right at 60?*

**Vernon Scofield:** I had become physically disabled from one thing or another so in anticipation of being 60 and one thing or another, I was declared 100% totally disabled, and got artificial knees, had a fractured skull, had pacemaker surgery four times. I could go on, but anyway . . .

*You look like you're doing great.*



**Vernon Scofield:** I'm blind in this eye.

*Sure, but you said you're 89 though which is, that's great.*

**Mrs. Scofield:** Will be.

*Will be, yes ma'am.*

**Vernon Scofield:** Will be in July.

**Mrs. Scofield:** The 9<sup>th</sup> of July.

**Vernon Scofield:** When I was discharged 100% totally disabled, they didn't think I'd live but about another year or two.

*Wow. So you're going to prove them wrong by a bit. I was going to ask you two both, going back to the beginning of the interview, you had mentioned that your great grandmother was a niece of Sam Houston? Are there any family stories that passed down through the generations about Houston at all, or anything like that or just something you know?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Nothing, no words. It's so far back.

*I still think that's pretty fascinating that, you know, Houston was such a prominent figure, especially in Texas history, to be able to claim some connection to him that way.*

**Vernon Scofield:** My grandfather was, as I mentioned a moment ago, a doctor, and he moved from Kentucky to Hillsboro. And because he was the only doctor in Hill County, he didn't have to go into the military.

*During the civil war?*

**Vernon Scofield:** During the civil war.

**Mrs. Scofield:** He delivered my father.

*Really, wow. That is something else. And your grandfather was named Houston, is that right?*

**Vernon Scofield:** My grandfather's name was John Samuel, and he married a niece of Sam Houston.

*He married the niece, okay.*

**Vernon Scofield:** And they had eight children, and the oldest they named . . .

*The oldest they named Houston.*

**Vernon Scofield:** He graduated from A&M in 1888.

*Is that your father, or one of your uncles?*

**Vernon Scofield:** My father was the youngest of the eight. Houston was the oldest.

*So he was one of your uncles?*

**Vernon Scofield:** My father was . . . anyway, he'd have to be 15 or 20 years younger.

*Younger, yes sir. I understand big families and that sort of thing. Did you ever meet your Uncle Houston?*

**Vernon Scofield:** No.

**Mrs. Scofield:** Yes you did, Vernon. I remember him.

*You remember him? Yes ma'am.*

**Mrs. Scofield:** Yeah, he used to visit Vernon's parents during the '40s and '50s. He lived a long life.

*That's great. That's something else.*

**Vernon Scofield:** When he moved to North Texas, did he?

**Mrs. Scofield:** What?

**Vernon Scofield:** Didn't he move someplace in North Texas.

**Mrs. Scofield:** Gainesville. He lived in Gainesville. And so they were pretty far apart. Yes, I remember family gatherings, and I remember Uncle Houston.

*Uncle Houston, yeah.*

**Vernon Scofield:** She has a good memory, and I have nothing.

*Well, sir, you've told me a lot in this interview. You say you don't have a memory but you've told me a lot throughout the course of this.*

**Mrs. Scofield:** That's a little better probably in this deal than maybe some of the other.

*I know, sir, I'm taking up some of your time but I want to let you know that at the General Land Office we have all of our archives that we save these interviews in. So this interview is, in part, about saving veterans' stories for future generations for posterity and that sort of thing. We have archives that go back to Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin. We have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo, and Stephen F. Austin's original register that he kept in his own hand of all the settlers. So this interview will be added into that archive with all the other interviews. With that in mind, I was wondering if there was anything you'd want to say to future generations that may be listening to this interview years from now?*

**Vernon Scofield:** Well, I tell people I served for over 40 years, 20 years in the National Guard and 20 years active duty. And I've told you the history of all that, and that I never volunteered for a day. This A&M put me into it. But I never had any difficulties or unhappiness, those kinds of things. I served through it, a really remarkable amount of service for any individual.

**Mrs. Scofield:** Met lots of nice people through all the years, made lots of friends.

**Vernon Scofield:** And Scofield Ranch existed from Parmer Lane down to Howard Lane, from Loop 1 to just short of the airstrip. There wasn't any IH-35.

*Yeah, no 35 then, sure. That's amazing. Well, sir, I really want to thank you and you too, ma'am, for letting me interview you all today. And I just want to let you know that Commissioner Patterson's a veteran, and I'm a veteran, and everybody at the Land Office, veteran or not, appreciates your service to our country. And this interview is just one small way of saying thank you.*